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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/3/2016

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S BORDER CHIEF DISCUSSES U.S. ASSISTANCE AND RUSSIA'S ROLE

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Hoagland, Ambassador, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met with Chairman of the Border Protection Committee General Saidamir Zuhurov on February 2 to assess his views on U.S. assistance and to seek his views on Russia's role in Tajik border affairs. Zuhurov praised the United States as a most reliable partner. Though sometimes exasperated with the Russians, he described their role as "huge" and necessarily unavoidable. Zuhurov was open about other foreign assistance from Iran and China for border security - essentially very little. He praised the United States for being the largest and most reliable donor. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador commented to Zuhurov that when former Russian Ambassador Maksim Peshkov was in Tajikistan, they had an open and productive relationship. However, Moscow's attitude towards the United States seems to have changed. The Ambassador asked Zuhurov if the Border Protection Committee maintains a good relationship with Russia. Zuhurov touted President Rahmonov's open-door foreign policy, and said that he works well with all of his partners, including the commander of the Russian border guards. However, the relationship can be difficult. Presidents Putin and Rahmonov can reach agreements and make promises, but they do not always get translated into action at

the working level.

13. (C) For example, Tajikistan has an agreement with Russia to send Border Guards to Russia for FSB training free of charge. Recently, the FSB has presented Tajikistan a bill for the over 30 Tajik officers training in Russia for \$42,000 per officer for the four-year course. Zuhurov characterized this amount as extortionist. Before President Rahmonov's mid-January visit to Saint Petersburg, Zuhurov had drafted a protest letter for Rahmonov to sign and hand-deliver to Putin. Zuhurov smiled that the "Russian bureaucrats in Dushanbe went hysterical" that Zuhurov had managed to get his message directly to Putin.

14. (C) The Ambassador asked about Russia's current role in Tajikistan. Zuhurov replied, "It is huge," and naturally so because of over 70 years shared history, shared language, and the over 500,000 Tajik labor migrants in Russia. There are 50 Russian border guard advisors in Tajikistan and an additional 250 support staff. Zuhurov added refusing assistance from Russia would be "senseless." Tajikistan depends too much on Russia for supplies and materials. He added Russia is geographically close to Tajikistan, whereas Europe is thousands of kilometers away and the United States is "on the other side of the world." The Ambassador acknowledged that it is absolutely normal for Tajikistan to have a close relationship with Russia, given their historical, linguistic, cultural, economic and security ties.

15. (C) During the past year, the Ambassador explained, it has appeared Russia has wanted to limit the United States' role in the region and this may be a problem, certainly not beneficial, for Tajikistan and the region. Zuhurov nodded his acknowledgment. The Ambassador asked what other countries provide border security assistance. Zuhurov openly listed

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contributions Tajikistan has received: China delivered eight vehicles including two jeeps and four trucks, medical equipment and uniforms; Germany gave 450 night vision goggles and communications equipment; the United Kingdom, under the guise of BOMCA and with U.S. support, helped construct a training center.

Although Tajikistan petitioned Iran for supplies, Iran has offered nothing but \$100K cash and promises.

16. (C) The Ambassador asked if Russia will help repair the two helicopters they gave Tajikistan. Zuhurov said that they are practically beyond repair. One helicopter is from 1983, the other dates to 1986, and both have been fully reconditioned at least three times. In normal circumstances, they should now be decommissioned and mothballed, but Tajikistan maintains the helicopters because it needs them. To fully repair the helicopters to international standards would cost \$490K each, money Tajikistan does not have.

17. (C) Zuhurov emphasized that, at every opportunity he is with President Rahmonov or the media, he applauds the United States for its generous contributions, specifically mentioning the United States as the largest assistance provider. Zuhurov commented that he does not hide anything and, sometimes, Russian journalists do not like what he has to say. The Ambassador pointed out that the Russian press, in particular, does not treat Tajikistan fairly. Zuhurov characterized Russian media reporting on Tajikistan as mostly "slander."

18. (C) The Ambassador expressed his goal to make U.S. contributions more efficient and effective. Zuhurov acknowledged that he did not want to waste U.S. funds, and both agreed to use local supplies and contractors in future border checkpoint projects. Both the Ambassador and Zuhurov admitted that \$80,000 was too much for what the United States actually delivered at the Bratsva border post. Zuhurov noted using local materials and contractors would have cut the cost in half. He added that if any of his officers built the post the way the United States did at Bratsva, he would have fired them. He stated the additional U.S. funds to IOM for further construction at Bratsva would go to local procurement and contractors so that

Tajikistan can have "a nice solid building like on the Uzbek side of the border." But he complimented the Embassy team as individuals and promised to cooperate as closely as possible with the United States.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador asked if he and Zuhurov could hold a joint press conference at a zastava that has received emergency U.S. assistance. Zuhurov said that he had already been thinking about such an event, but would like to wait for warmer weather to complete the repair of one or two of the border posts on the Tajik-Afghan border before taking journalists there. "Maybe in March, when there are flowers," he suggested.

¶10. (C) Zuhurov thanked the Ambassador and the U.S. team for the border assistance and reiterated that he "tells everyone at every opportunity, including President Rahmonov," about the United States' support. He recounted that during a recent governmental meeting, Rahmonov had embarrassed him by chiding the other ministers, "Learn from Zuhurov how you should work with your partners."

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Although Zuhurov must maintain a good relationship with Russia, he expressed a degree of exasperation with Russian lower-level officials and their unwillingness to carry out promises made at the top. He genuinely appreciates Western, especially U.S. assistance, and recognizes that the United States is Tajikistan's primary partner in border security, capable of delivering on its promises. For our part,

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we continue to see Zuhurov as an open and honest partner, a trusted voice in the Tajik government who has a direct channel to Rahmonov. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND